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Question Time: Armed police drones?

North Dakota first to allow 'less than lethal' technology

By Rob Burgess
Tribune Night Editor

[**Editor's note:** To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

The use of drones equipped with weapons is an idea we're accustomed to thinking of it only associated with the military in far-flung corners of the globe. But not any longer.

"It is now legal for law enforcement in North Dakota to fly drones armed with everything from Tasers to tear gas thanks to a last-minute push by a pro-police lobbyist," reported Justin Glawe of The Daily Beast on Wednesday. "With all the concern over the militarization of police in the past year, no one noticed that the state became the first in the union to allow police to equip drones with 'less than lethal' weapons. House Bill 1328 wasn't drafted that way, but then a lobbyist representing law enforcement—tight with a booming drone industry—got his hands on it. The bill's stated intent was to require police to obtain a search warrant from a judge in order to use a drone to search for criminal evidence. In fact, the original draft of Representative Rick Becker's bill would have banned all

weapons on police drones. Then Bruce Burkett of the North Dakota Peace Officer's Association was allowed by the state house committee to amend HB 1328 and limit the prohibition only to lethal weapons. 'Less than lethal' weapons like rubber bullets, pepper spray, tear gas, sound cannons, and Tasers are therefore permitted on police drones."

So, we wanted to know: "Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?"

Your answers

"Wow. Police have gone military. This is very disturbing to me. George Orwell 2015." — **Richard Burton**

"Why not? Send them to Ferguson and places like that. Like, where angels fear to tread, send drones." — **Linda Powell-Heiny**

"I'm sure nothing could go wrong. End sarcasm." — **Ray King**

Our answers

"I'm having a hard time imagining a situation in which a nonlethal weapon would need to be deployed where an officer's physical presence would put him or bystanders in mortal danger. If those criteria can't be met I don't see why law enforcement would need to have battle drones - it's one more tool that could be used poorly by overreaching law enforcement officers. But if North Dakota is going to let them have such drones, lawmakers will need to

think long and hard about whether they intend to restrict such drones' use or possession by civilians.” — **Sarah Einselen**

“As long as it says, ‘Thank you for your cooperation,’ when it's done gassing me. — **Steve Mullen**

“This is awful. This impersonal, militarized technology will inevitably lead to misuse. Also, ‘less than lethal’ weapons can and do kill people all the time. Police and military are supposed to serve two separate functions: Police are supposed to be on the street, protecting and serving the communities which employ them. Military is supposed to target and destroy an enemy. Which one does this sound more like to you?” — **Rob Burgess**

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